The Chatham Wine Wars Series - It's Not Just A Local Story.

Should the wealthy be able to change a community for their hobby against the wishes of an entire town? It could happen in your community - and not this is not NIMBY, it's about quality of life.

Joshua Powell +

LET'S GET READY TO PARTY
How the Wine Wars in Chatham Will Change New York
THIS IS NOT JUST A LOCAL ISSUE
THE POWELL HOUSE PRESS

Good morning,

As promised, tomorrow and every Wednesday I will pull back more of the curtain on the unfolding saga of Fox Hill Vineyards. Consider this a standing appointment. This story might be specific about the small town of Chatham NY, but it has implications for the entire state and it illustrates what the world is dealing with today. **Should one or two people with money have the right and opportunity to alter the lives of an entire community?**

First, the "personal" why. Why am I covering this story? I love this land. I grew up on it. And I hold a rather unfashionable conviction that no single individual, however credentialed, however moneyed, should be permitted to quietly dismantle the character of a historic community while the neighbors aren't looking. What's happening at Fox Hill is not farming. Everyone knows it. Let's stop pretending otherwise. Mrs. Williams wanted to have wedding parties. Farming? Interesting.

Maybe the Kardashians will take up blacktopping driveways between shows on Bravo.

Life is strange.

Now, about Dr. Williams. The man has been, shall we say, economical with the facts. The farming bona fides? Thin. The reference to an agricultural education? Artfully misleading. The regulatory law experience? Perhaps legitimate in medicine, but medicine is not manure, and a stethoscope is not a combine harvester. Most troubling: the paperwork submitted to the town regarding the size and scope of this project tells a materially different story than the breezy email he dispatched to the Powell House Press back in December. And here's the detail that should make your antennae quiver: he filed for a change of zoning in October. October! So one has to ask: why the silence? Why not share this with the community whose landscape he proposes to transform? Why drag the town and residence through the charade of the ZAB hearings?

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I have my theories.

Without a functioning local press, and with enough money sloshing around, an astonishing amount can be obscured. Opacity, it turns out, is expensive to maintain but remarkably cheap to purchase.

So the Powell House Press, along with a scrappy band of volunteer investigators, began reaching out to the county and the town. At first, responses came quickly, though the answers had a curious habit of not quite matching the questions. That's the thing about emails, isn't it? They linger. They accumulate. They form a paper trail. Haven't we all learned from the Epstein files just how stubbornly permanent the written word can be?

Which brings me to this: the Powell House Press has filed FOIL requests with both municipalities. You can read the requests by clicking the link below. Let's see who knew what, and precisely when they knew it. It's the law. Let's follow it. Let's flood this story with light, blinding, unsparing light.

Do read tomorrow's Powell House Press. I get into the weeds, forgive the agricultural metaphor, and I have some rather pointed thoughts on farming and the people who actually do it and what they're growing.

Until tomorrow.

Read the FOIL Requests